

Sunday after Ascension 2021
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
Acts 1.1-11 St. Luke 24.49-52



They say a picture is worth a thousand words. Stained glass windows and icons in churches, and religious art in museums tell stories. The word *icon* means *window*; Eastern Orthodoxy teaches icons are words in painting and are windows into heaven.

Salvador Dali's surrealistic painting *The Ascension of Christ*...the insert in this morning's Order of Service...simply cannot be adequately described in words. It has been talked about in previous sermons and discussion groups...and likely many more in the future.

Dali's painting is profoundly incarnational. Christianity is an incarnational religion. We believe God became a human male in the form of Jesus Christ. Jesus had a real flesh and blood body. He suffered real physical pain during his Passion. He really died on the cross for us...his ultimate act of love. He rose again on Easter Day...and he still had a body that could be seen and touched.

We say in the Nicene Creed, Jesus ascended into heaven. The Apostles saw Jesus go straight up into the sky surrounded by bright white light. What makes Dali's painting so compelling and worth talking about at this time every year? We see the Ascension as the Disciples saw it...the last they saw of Jesus was his unwashed feet...we see his unwashed feet.

Christianity does not teach and has never taught we become angels when we die, or spend eternity as disembodied spirits. Jesus' unwashed feet are the proof he took his body back to heaven with him. He didn't leave it behind. When we ascend into heaven at the end of time, we will take our bodies with us. It will not matter if we forget to wash our feet...our entire bodies will be made perfectly clean by the Blood of the Lamb.

Our Liturgical reenactment of the Ascension took place during the reading of the Gospel. We paused briefly at the point Saint Luke tells us Jesus departed from the disciples and was taken up into heaven. Our eyes are focused on the Paschal Candle that has been lighted throughout the Easter Season. We extinguish

the Paschal Candle...symbolizing Jesus, the Light of the World...returning to heaven to take the position of honor to the right of his Father.

Jesus told the Disciples he was going back to his Father who had sent him. They could not possibly have understood what he meant when he then told them his was going away for their own good. Their eyes had yet to be opened to the truth of what Jesus was saying. It was for our good too he went back to heaven.

Jesus gave to his Disciples two final acts of love before he went back to heaven. He told them not to be discouraged...and he gave them his blessing. Jesus told his Disciples he would always be with them until it was time for him to come back. We don't know when Jesus will return. God has his own timetable.

Acts tells us the Disciples stood looking up at the sky. They could no longer see Jesus' bare feet. He had been swallowed up into the cloud and bright white light. Neither could they fully understand what they had just witnessed. The angels promised they would see Jesus come back one day in the same way he left...surrounded by white clouds and bright light. So will we!

What we're supposed to be doing until then is using the gifts God has given us to spread the Good News. We want to be effective witnesses for Jesus. We can't do that without the Helper Jesus promised he would send to strengthen and guide us in our work.

Dali's surrealistic painting of the *Ascension of Christ* is a powerful window into heaven and what lies in store for us at our own ascensions into clouds and bright white light.

The angels told the Disciples to stop looking up into the clouds and go back to Jerusalem to wait for further instructions. Next Sunday, Pentecost, we celebrate the day they received those instructions and their mission was made clear to them.

We already have our instructions. We have work to do. So let's not stand idle...let's get busy. And for now, we should wash our feet before heading out the door.

